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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that for students to perform well in speaking, reading, and writing they need to possess a rich vocabulary. Studies have consistently shown that "vocabulary size correlates with success in all areas of the curriculum" (Manning, 1999). This Topical Bibliography and Commentary reviews the recent research literature on the importance of teaching vocabulary development and on ways educators can integrate writing into the curriculum utilizing the vocabulary learned. As writing is heavily dependent upon an author's ability to draw upon words to describe an event, vocabulary development must be taken seriously in the classroom. Since the emphasis in teacher education is on reading, many teachers do not know how to teach writing, nor do they feel comfortable teaching writing. Students' writing skills can be enhanced through improved vocabulary and by teachers creating a writer-centered classroom where instruction is individualized. Teaching writing should not be approached as a survey class, but rather as a process that must be studied in depth. (Contains 5 Internet addresses and 11 references.) (NKA)

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Vocabulary's Influence on Successful Writing

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Introduction

One of our great American authors wrote "The difference between the right word and nearly the right word is the same as that between lightning and the lightning bug" (Mark Twain as quoted by Sloan, 1996, p. 268). Twain's point is well-taken in that good writers are able to skillfully use a variety of descriptive and specific words in their writing to convey accurate meanings to their readers.

Research indicates that in order for students to perform well in speaking, reading and writing they need to possess a rich vocabulary (Ediger, 1999, p. 7; Laflamme, 1997, p. 372; Manning, 1999, p. 103). "Vocabulary development becomes a tool to take in, such as listening and reading, as well as provide communication to others within the framework of speaking and writing" (Ediger, 1999, p. 7). Research studies have consistently shown that "vocabulary size correlates with success in all areas of the curriculum" (Manning, 1999, p. 103). The following summary will discuss the findings of recent research on the importance of teaching vocabulary development and ways we can integrate writing into the curriculum utilizing the vocabulary learned.

The Need for Direct Instruction in Writing

During the 1980's there was much research done on teaching writing by such people as Graves (1985), Calkins (1983), and Atwell (1984). Since then public schools began focusing more on writing, but the need for more direct instruction continues to be felt (Thompson, 2002). As Ediger points out, "[u]se cannot be made of a new vocabulary term unless understanding of prerequisites in vocabulary terms is prevalent" (Ediger, 1999, p. 8). Thus descriptive writing necessitates a larger vocabulary than reading. In order to develop better writing skills, our methods of teaching vocabulary need to be re-evaluated. As Eller, Pappas, & Brown (1988) contend, our traditional methods of teaching vocabulary "has impeded children's ability to express ideas in written discourse" (as cited in Corona, Spangenberger, & Venet, 1998, p. 7). Colleges often provide classes to re-teach writing skills, but businesses continue to complain that graduates cannot write clearly. Several states have responded by including a writing assessment test for students at different grade levels. Some high schools require a writing grade along with a content grade for each class. The Stanford Achievement Tests now include a section for students to submit a writing sample (Corona et al., 1998, p. 6-7).

It is important for teachers to have a clear understanding of their role in teaching the writing process. Because the emphasis in teacher education programs is on reading, many teachers do not know how, nor do they feel comfortable, teaching writing (Corona et al., 1998, p. 7). Fletcher (1993) and Graves (1994) both agree with Corona et al. (p. 23) "that it is important for writing teachers to begin with their own literacy" and to view themselves as authors. Among initiates to support the enrichment of teachers' literacy skills, writing workshops as well as ongoing support and guidance from colleagues has been found very beneficial (Corona et al., p. 23). One of the challenges in teaching writing is that the writing process is a much more subjective area of teaching than reading. Teachers must understand how to balance "technical skills with freedom of expression and with discipline to finish a written piece. Written expression remains a difficult process to teach, to evaluate, and to encourage (Corona et al., p. 7)" and due to the complexity and subjectivity of the writing process, the solution cannot be found in one or two answers.

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Principles of Vocabulary Development

As writing is heavily dependent upon an author's ability to draw upon words to describe an event, vocabulary development must be taken seriously in the classroom. Researchers have discovered common principles that should be included in a comprehensive vocabulary development program.

1. Teachers must be enthusiastic in teaching learning strategies for vocabulary development (Brabham, Greene, & Villaume, 2002; Laflamme, 1997, p. 380) and highlight interesting words used in their studies and by their students throughout the day. Manning concurs: "...as the teacher, I set the tone by sharing my own curiosity about words. If I find the study of affixes interesting, my students will follow suit" (1999, p. 104). As one teacher noted, "My enthusiasm over words sparks word curiosity, resulting in an Interesting Word Wall where our interesting words are posted. Now students look to the wall for new words to try out in their writing (Sloan, 1996, p. 268).
2. Teachers must offer direct instruction of techniques or procedures to develop a varied vocabulary (Laflamme, 1997, p. 380; Ediger, 1999, p. 14)). This can and should be done formally through the language arts program, and informally through story time with pupils. Megan Sloan suggests that teachers share literature that is full of rich vocabulary. In her classroom, pupils join in the experience as "[w]e *lunge* into the water like the herons in *In the Small, Small Pond* (Fleming, 1993). We watch the sheep *scatter* through the meadow and the trout *flash* 'like jewels in the sunlight' in *All the Places to Love* (MacLachlan, 1994). We smile as Matthew *embraces* Nicoletta in *Matthew's Dream* (Lionni, 1991)" (Sloan, 1996, p. 268). Students may be asked to create a word bank through words-of-the-day that may be taken from classroom literature as well as content material from other subjects (Corona, 1998, p. 25).
3. As new words are being taught, they must be connected to previous knowledge and experiences (Laflamme, p. 380; Ediger, p. 14) and integrated into other content areas within the classroom. For vocabulary instruction to be effective, it cannot be abstract; teachers "must assist students in attaching personal meanings by relating them to their own experiences, visualizations and backgrounds" (Manning, 1999, p. 104). Using strategies such as mapping, webbing and feature analysis, students can place new words in their proper environment and make connections with words already existing in their own repertoire (Manning, p. 104).
4. Intensive practice and repetition are important in developing familiarity with words and understanding how they are used (Laflamme, p. 380). A practice method used by Sloan is to pair up students and have them search through text and literature books for new and interesting words. They record the 'interesting word' and then write "the common word the author could have used" (Sloan, 1996, p. 268). Word searches can be part of the reading process for book reports, research reports, etc. encouraging students to constantly watch for interesting words. As students become more aware of interesting and common words, they will begin to see that words can differ by shades of meaning "(e.g., sped, raced, crept, tiptoed, sauntered)" (Sloan, p. 268). Some teachers encourage students to develop a repertoire of "word cousins" whether through a wall chart or their own personal record keeping.
5. Learner involvement is necessary in applying definitions to various situations appropriately (Laflamme, p. 380). Students should be given opportunities to take what they have learned and practice using it in the classroom before they use it in society (Ediger, 1999, p. 7). Oral and written presentations within the classroom provide opportunities for children to be involved in applying their knowledge. Alongside vocabulary development, students must be taught new strategies for learning words independently (Ediger, 1999, p. 14).
6. Schools, teachers and students commitment to vocabulary development in the long-term occurs when this is made an integral part of the whole curriculum at every level (Laflamme, 1997, p. 380).

Improving Student Writing Skills Using a Richer Vocabulary

Improvement in vocabulary development will result in improvement in writing skills provided the teacher is able to create a classroom that takes writing seriously across the curriculum. Students' writing skills can be enhanced through improved vocabulary and by teachers creating a writer-centered classroom. "In such a classroom, process and environment are closely intertwined and interdependent (Corona, 1998, p. 24)." In a writing-centered classroom, teachers individualize writing instruction, give short lessons to small groups and individuals on how to evaluate and improve their writing, and assist

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students to become what Templeton calls "wordsmiths" (as cited in Corona, 1998, p. 24). Wordsmiths are students who view words as powerful communication tools. This is accomplished through modeling and analyzing the rich language found in "literature, picture books, story-telling, and poetry (Corona, 1998, p. 24)."

Research suggests that the writing process is improved when it includes conferencing with teachers and fellow students (Atwell, 1991; Calkins, 1994 as cited in Corona, 1998, p. 23). When topics are chosen, students should meet with teachers to discuss ideas, answer questions as well as discuss how to rework their projects. The teacher's role is to "try to extend what the youngster can do as a writer" (Calkins as cited in Corona, p. 23). The teacher encourages, builds on strengths and helps the writer "to see more in his writing than he sees" (Fletcher as cited in Corona, p. 23). If teachers decide to use peer collaboration, they should be given training on how to be a helpful evaluator as well as time to practice their evaluation skills on each other. Students need to know what kinds of comments are helpful, how to compliment and how to offer suggestions. This not only trains students, but sends a message that this exercise is considered an important part of the program (Corona, 1998, p. 34).

There are many different forms of writing that students may engage in. "Research has shown that students will have a greater investment in their writing when given the opportunity to make choices" (Hansen, 1987 as cited in Corona, 1998, p. 25). Researchers and teachers supply a myriad of suggestions that allow students to draw on their personal experiences and knowledge. A few of the suggestions are:

1. Journal entries dated and written for each subject. Ediger suggests that "[j]ournal entries should be written freely to indicate what had been learned in a given lesson" (Ediger, 1999, p. 10).
2. Diary entries may be dated and written for each day indicating what the pupil has learned for that particular day. And further to this, logs may be dated and written each week summarizing the information from the diary. This type of writing encourages proper sequencing of events and allows the student to review what has been learned.
3. Book reports may be written which relate to a particular lesson or unit of study.
4. Outlines may be written when preparing research projects, or when preparing for oral presentations.
5. Poetry may be used in almost any lesson or unit of study, highlighting new words introduced and learning how to properly use those words in writing. "There can be unrhymed verse written such as free verse. Or poetry written may contain rhyme such as couplets, triplets, quatrains, and limericks" (Ediger, 1999, p. 11). Lower elementary pupils may listen as teachers read poems, and then memorize the poems themselves. As they recite the poems "encourage students to give the interesting words life" (Sloan, 1996, p. 268). As words become more familiar to the tongue, they will feel more comfortable using these words in their writing.
6. Publishing books is a wonderful way to encourage writing. The choices are endless. Students may be given the freedom to write their own stories, or may be asked to write within a certain genre. Lower elementary students, who are not yet proficient readers, may write their own alphabet book. One classroom teacher reads several ABC books to her students, and then asks them to choose a theme and compose their own alphabet book (Sloan, 1996, p. 268).
7. Have each student maintain a writer's notebook. Ask students "to write down thoughts, ideas, responses, words, or phrases...The notebook provides the springboard for writing pieces students may pursue" (Corona, 1998, p. 28).

One of the most important factors in developing a writing-centered classroom is to provide blocks of time for "students to experience the writing process" (Corona, 1998, p. 25). Teaching writing should not be approached as a survey class, but rather as a process that must be studied in depth. There are many writing opportunities available within "each curriculum area and within each lesson taught" (Ediger, 1999, p. 11). Graves suggests that teachers rethink their classroom time schedules and allow at least four blocks of time each week for concentrated writing (as cited in Corona, p. 25).

Conclusion

According to the results of recent research, when the language environment is enriched and adequate time and instruction is given to the writing process, student writing improves. Corona et al. developed a program in 1998 for improving student writing. Two of the three major components of the program were "enriching the language environment, [and] creating settings that motivate student writing" (Corona, 1998, p. iii). Over a five-month span, student results showed strong improvement in vocabulary and writing skills.

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In another project Laflamme studied "the effect of the Multiple Exposure Vocabulary Method and the Target Reading/Writing Strategy on verbal abilities as measured by the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT)" (Laflamme, 1997, p. 372). Laflamme wished to study methods that "enhance the acquisition of vocabulary and lead to improved reading and writing ability". The project was a yearlong commitment to improve verbal abilities. The results were that the experimental group outperformed students who received traditional instruction (Laflamme, p. 375).

There are numerous opportunities within each classroom and within each lesson for students to improve their vocabulary development. As research has demonstrated, there are many interventions that teachers and researchers have discovered that can help strengthen vocabulary skills which can lead to better writing (Boling, Martin, & Martin, 2002; Carnicelli, 2001; Foil & Alber, 2002; Smith, 2002). Teachers need to be aware and take advantage of these opportunities for vocabulary development and give time to the writing process so that children develop a greater proficiency with words to communicate more effectively in writing.

Internet Resources

•Vocabulary Instruction in Elementary Schools (ERIC bibliography)
http://eric.indiana.edu/ieo/bibs/vocabele.html
•Vocabulary Instruction in Secondary Schools (ERIC bibliography)
http://eric.indiana.edu/ieo/bibs/vocabsec.html
•Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension Activities for Language Minority Students (ERIC bibliography)
http://eric.indiana.edu /ieo/bibs/vocabrng.html
•Vocabulary Instruction and Reading Comprehension (ERIC Digest)
http://eric.indiana.edu /ieo/digests/d126.html
•Vocabulary & Spelling Resources from the Web English Teacher's resource page
http://www.webenglishteacher.com/vocab.html

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